Teresa's Demons: Teresa of Ávila's Influence on the Cartesian Skeptical Scenario of Demonic Deception

Jan Forsman, University of Iowa, jan-forsman@uiowa.edu

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Abstract: Recent research in Baroque Scholastic and early modern meditational exercises has demonstrated similarity between Descartes's *Meditations* and St. Teresa of Ávila's *El Castillo Interior*. While there is growing agreement on the influence of Catholic meditations on Descartes, the extent of Teresa's role is debated. Instead of discussing the full extent of Teresa's influence, this paper concentrates on one example of the considered influence: the skeptical scenario of demonic deception, having clear anticipation in Teresa's work where the exercitant faces off against deceiving demonic forces, which confound and temporarily halt the meditative progress. The paper analyzes Teresa's use of deceptive demons and its influence on the Cartesian Evil Demon scenario, while contrasting both with a discussion of demonic deception in late Medieval and Baroque Scholastic context, arguing that demonological discussions in 1500's allowed both Teresa's and Descartes's deceivers to not only cause diversions but to make the deception laborious to resist.

Keywords: Early Modern Women, Teresa of Ávila, Descartes, Skepticism, Demons, Meditation

Introduction

Baroque Scholastic[1] and early modern meditational exercises, particularly Teresa of Avila's (1515–1582) *El Castillo Interior* (1588; henceforth *Castillo*), have in recent years gained more philosophical interest

[1] *Baroque Scholasticism*, or *Second Scholasticism*, was a revival of scholastic philosophy in the midst of the scientific revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries. While many of its representatives belonged to the surviving schools of Scotism and Thomism

for their influence on René Descartes's (1596–1650) *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (1641–1642; henceforth *Meditations*). (Rorty 1983; 1986; Hatfield 1985; 1986; Vendler 1989; Rubidge 1990; Bagger 2002; Hettche 2010; Mercer 2014; 2017; Ariew 2019; Underkuffler 2020; Griffioen & Phillips forthcoming.) Teresa, a Spanish Carmelite nun and a reformer of the Carmelite Order, was one of the leading figures of Catholic mysticism during the time of the Counter-Reformation. She was beatified in 1614, canonized in 1622, and named Doctor of the Church in 1970, as the first woman. (E.g., Medwick 2000, x–xi; Lehfeldt 2017, 217.[2]) Like many meditative works of the period, Teresa's *Castillo* has the author share advice on how to acquire more accurate knowledge of the self, become increasingly familiar with divinity and enter a spiritual marriage with God. Both Teresa and Descartes urge an introspective turn away from external sensory matters to notice aspects of the soul that might otherwise go unnoticed, emphasize the arduousness of the meditative journey, struggle with customary concerns forcing their way into the meditations, and see proper self-knowledge as a springboard to knowledge of God. (*Castillo* I, i, 5; I, ii, 8–9; II, i, 1–8; AT VII, 12, 17, 22, 53; CSM II, 9, 12, 15, 37, 94; see Mercer 2014, 34–35; 2017.)

While there is growing agreement on the influence of Catholic mystical-theological meditations on Descartes's own *Meditations*, the extent of that influence, and specifically Teresa's role in it, is debated. Some take Descartes "owing a debt" to Teresa (Mercer 2017). Others see him following more

from late Medieval Scholasticism (e.g., Thomas Cajetan [1469–1534] on the Thomist and Bartholomew Mastrius [1602–1673] on the Scotist side), most influential thinkers tended to belong to the established Jesuit order, such as Pedro de Fonseca (1528–1599), Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and especially Fransisco Suárez (1548–1617).

[2] For more on Teresa's life, see Peers (2002); Carrera (2005). For her mysticism and connection to the so called "mystagogical" tradition, see Griffioen & Phillips (forthcoming).

"Augustinian" meditation, in the style of Francis de Sales (1567–1622), than "Ignatian", which Teresa is seen to follow (Hatfield 1985; 1986; Ariew 2019; Underkuffler 2020).[3] Some view Descartes drawing from a large genre of meditative "mystagogical" exercises, instead of just particularly Teresa's (Rorty 1983; 1986; Griffioen & Phillips forthcoming). Others claim that the similarities are mostly superficial (Rubidge 1990). This paper takes a different approach, concentrating on a particular example of the considered influence: the skeptical scenario of demonic deception. As Mercer (2017) has established, the famous Cartesian Evil Demon has clear anticipation in Teresa's work where the meditative character faces off against deceiving demonic forces. This demonic influence deserves a deeper look, extending on the previous argumentation.

The paper is divided in the following way. In the first section, conceptual similarities between Descartes's and Teresa's demons are presented, justifying the comparison of the two. In the second section, Teresa's demons are compared to the late Medieval discussion of God's possible deception and the difference between demonic and divine deception is analyzed. It is argued that both Teresa and Descartes follow the Medieval distinction in the sphere of influence between God and demons with the latter being able to directly affect only our senses and imagination, but not intellect or will. In the third

[3] The distinction between "Augustinian" and "Ignatian" meditation is argued to be in the underlying cognitive basis. Augustinian meditation, taking after St. Augustine's (354–430) *Confessions*, places emphasis on intellectual contemplation, stressing that the end goals of the meditative exercise cannot be reached by sensory or imaginative means (having a more Neo-Platonic basis); Ignatian meditation, taking after Ignatius de Loyola's (1491–1556) *Exercitia Spiritualia* (1548), stresses the use of sensory and imaginative functions during the meditative exercise, particularly by actively imagining great Christian scenes (having a more Aristotelian basis). See Hatfield 1986, 48; Underkuffler 2020, 565–567. Note, however, that Teresa was likewise greatly influenced by Augustine and she in fact recommends withdrawing from sensory temptations in the *Castillo.*

section, the discussion concentrates on how during the 1500's, demons began to gain power not only to affect senses and imagination but to create images and even put thoughts and propositional content in people's minds, opening the door for both Teresa's and Descartes's deceivers to not only cause diversions but to make it laborious to resist the deception. While Descartes's Demon is even stronger than Teresa's, able to even sever the exercitant's physical ties to existing reality, its influence can be clearly seen in Teresa's exercitant's struggles with demons capable of causing desires and tempting images that are hard to shed. In the fourth section, historical precedent and evidence for Teresa's direct influence on Descartes is presented through the latter's studies at the La Flechè Jesuit School and later familiarity with Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629) and the French Oratory. It is argued that while Descartes for the most part follows a meditational style that is considered distinct from Teresa, in the case of demonic deception, his handling of the topic is clearly influenced by her.

1. Just Another Demon That I Meet?

At the end of the First Meditation, Descartes posits one of the most famous scenarios of radical skepticism:

> I will suppose then that […] *some malicious demon* (*genium aliquem malignum*) of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgment. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. (AT VII, 22–23; CSM II, 15. Emphasis added.)

In the passage, Descartes's exercitant imagines herself being tricked by a deceptive demon or malign spirit (*genius*), which has made all external things appear to her as they do, without any of them actually existing. By stoutly sticking to this thought experiment, she is able to later discover truths regarding her own self-awareness and God.

Although currently taking more contemporary alternative forms of *Matrix*-like virtual reality simulation or a brain-in-a-vat controlled by a mad scientist, the ghost of the Cartesian demon still haunts the pages of epistemological research and papers on radical skepticism to this day, with all attempts at exorcism proven unsuccessful. However, in recent years, research in later renaissance and early modern *meditative exercise* genre has demonstrated a similarity between Descartes's demonic deception and Teresa's *Castillo* (Mercer 2014; 2017; Griffioen & Phillips forthcoming).

Teresa's *Castillo*, divided into seven parts, called *Mansions*, compares the human soul to a perfect castle through which the "seeker", or the *exercitant*, is required to wander through seven different stages by the means of a meditative exercise to experience a mystical union with God. The metaphor compares the seven stages to seven dwelling places within the castle, with the first three representing what is achievable by human effort and ordinary grace, while the last three represent what can only be achieved with mystical experience. Self-knowledge and humility grow as the exercitant moves closer to the light of the innermost mansion, where the union with God's perfection can be experienced.

While not precisely an epistemological work, the *Castillo* requests the reader to make an introspective turn, leading the soul away from sensory impressions and bodily temptations (represented by "snakes

and vipers and poisonous creatures" which enter the first mansions from outside of the castle along with the exercitant; *Castillo* I, ii, 14) in order to notice aspects of itself that will otherwise be unnoticed.

> [Y]ou must understand that there are many ways of "being" in a place. Many souls remain in the outer court of the castle, which is the place occupied by the guards; they are not interested in entering it, and have no idea what there is in that wonderful place, or who dwells in it, or even how many rooms it has. (*Castillo* I, i, 5)

Teresa views that we will know the soul only vaguely if we do not attentively strip it clear of corporeal characteristics and lead our thinking away from the realm of the senses. However, to get the exercitant focus solely on the meditation, Teresa introduces an aspect of external deception by demonic influence.

> With regard to these first Mansions I can give some very useful information out of my own experience. I must tell you, for example, to think of them as comprising not just few rooms but a very large number (*un million*). There are many ways in which souls enter them, always with good intentions; but as the devil's intentions are always very bad, he has many *legions of evil spirits* in each room to prevent souls from passing from one to another, and as we, poor souls, fail to realize this, we are tricked by all kinds of deceptions. (*Castillo* I, ii, 12.)

Teresa describes how the devil has many "legions of evil spirits (*legions de demonios*)" in different rooms of the soul castle, to prevent the exercitant from passing between them by being "tricked by all kinds of deceptions". This is especially successful in the early parts of the castle for "the soul is still absorbed in

worldly affairs […], its vassals, which are the senses and the faculties given to it by God as part of its nature, have not the same power". (*Castillo* I, ii, 12.) The deception of these "evil spirits" or demons is such that the exercitant's former, earthly beliefs become extremely appealing, and her meditative progress comes to a halt in the First Mansions, before it even really began. And the only remedy is to persevere with the meditative journey and resist the deception of the demons in order to reach the further mansions (*Castillo* II, i, 4). (Cf. Mercer 2017, 2251.)

Teresa's description of the deceitful demons here sound eerily similar to Descartes's thought experiment of a deceiving malicious demon (*genium aliquem malignum*) who feeds the exercitant falsified sensory input, and the exercitant's only option is similarly to resist these urges and instead commit to their opposite, "stubbornly and firmly" persisting in the meditation and resolutely guard against "assenting to any falsehoods" (AT VII 23; CSM II 15).

Before further analysis of Teresa's demons, it is beneficial to do a historical detour. The thought of higher powers deceiving us is older than Teresa or Descartes. Several philosophers before considered that either God or Demons can deceive us even regarding to what we take as evident, and the extent of the deceit of these powers was not considered to be the same. Both Teresa and Descartes follow this difference in the deceit by divine or demonic powers, as it will be argued next.

2. Angels and Demons Dancing in My Head: Divine and Demonic Deception

The idea that a higher being (God or Demon) might be feeding fabricated information and globally deceiving me is typically taken to be an essential and distinguishing feature of modern, or *Cartesian*, skepticism. The potential deceit by a (nigh-)omnipotent god-like entity, combined with a strong divide

between mental and external "worlds", allows the Cartesian skeptic to bring the questioning to the external reality, including the skeptic's own corporeal body, and doubt the contents of mathematics and geometry. (Cf., e.g., Burnyeat 1982; M. Williams 1986; 2010; Grene 1999.)

However, Descartes, or Teresa for that matter, was by no means the first to propose the possibility of a deceitful deity.[4] During the late Medieval Scholastic period, several writers took it as evident that God could, or even actively does, deceive us, even perhaps on a global scale. The Condemnation of 1277, which also condemned certain propositions which were to limit God's omnipotence, offered fertile ground for epistemic questions of the efficient cause of our cognitions. (See Gilson 1999, 61–91; Bermúdez 2000, 345–347; 2008, 68–70.) The aftermath lead to more subtlety in epistemological theories, having to account for the possibility of God's intervention in the cognitive process. Authors such as William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347) discussed the possibility of God being able to bring about intuitive knowledge of non-existent objects (e.g., by preserving an object that has changed or ceased to exist). Although Ockham considered that in such a case, one would correctly judge the object to not exist, later Ockamists, such as Robert Holcot (1290–1349) and Adam de Wodeham (1298–1358), held that if God brought about intuitive cognition of the non-existent, we would not be able to distinguish between true and false cognition, making the false judgment that the non-exist object *does* exist. Other Medieval writers who discussed God's potential deception of our cognitive abilities and took it as evident that God could, or even actively does, deceive us, even perhaps on a global scale, included Nicholas of

[4] Several commentators have even noted ancient antecedents for divine deception, namely Plutarch and Cicero (*De Stoic.*, 1057; *Acad.* II, 15.47–48; see e.g., E. Curley 1978, 68–69; Bermúdez 2000, 341; 2008, 66; Broughton 2002, 43; Brown 2013, 27). While these passages are interesting, the author does not have the space to analyze them here.

Autrecout (1299–1369), John Rodington (c. 1290–1348), William Crathorn (fl. c. 1330), John Buridan (c. 1300–1361), Gregory of Rimini (1300–1358) and Gabriel Biel (c. 1420–1495), the latter two being among the examples Mersenne raises against Descartes's solution to his own version of the deceiver argument, that God's nature as infinitely good bars any deception (AT VII, 125; CSM II, 89–90).[5] Holcot and Rodington even hasten to say that benevolent God's deception is not with bad intention; maybe it is beneficial that God's deceives us, like a parent lying to their children for their own good (cf. AT VII, 126; CSM II, 90). (Gregory 1992a; Zupko 1993; Bermúdez 2008, 68–69; Karger 2004; 2010; Perler 2010.)

The case of demonic deception was likewise discussed in the late Medieval period. Following Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), the common view was that God alone could directly affect a person's will (outside the person themself, of course), while both God and (good) angels can directly affect a person's intellect. Demons, however, being bad angels, can only affect a person's senses and imagination directly, being capable of this in two ways: either from without (by sensible objects affecting the senses) or from within (affecting how the senses operate by disturbing the physiological order). This way, the demons can incite the senses and passions, cause visions in dreams, or even cause particular effects in nature (for example that a non-existing object appears apparent to the senses). However, they can only do this on sensory material level (which includes the imagination), and their influence on our reason or will is always indirect. (*ST* I, Q.111, a.1–4; *De Malo*, Q.16, a.9 & 11–12. Cf. Scarre 1990, 9; Perler 2010, 173–174.[6])

[5] Cf. Lagerlund 2010a, 17–19; 2010b; 2018; Pasnau 2017, 117–121. Ironically though, both Rimini and Biel agreed with Descartes.

[6] This discussion of demonic vs. divine powers goes back to Augustine. See Bagger 2002, 213. Note though that this is not to say that Aquinas saw demonic deception as a serious skeptical argument. I discuss this further below.

Both Teresa and Descartes clearly follow this Medieval distinction between the scope of deception by demons and God. Teresa describes the early mansions of the interior castle to be dangerous due to the exercitant still being absorbed with "worldly affairs", her senses easily tricked by temptations (*Castillo* I, ii, 12). The power of the demons is such that they make previous beliefs appear extremely appealing, tempting her with material pleasures or diving zeal and making them appear as almost eternal. (*Castillo* I, ii, 16; II, i, 3.) However, demons cannot affect the exercitant's reason, which asserts that what she is seeking is more valuable than the sensory-material things, or her will, which allows her to persist in the meditation and avert her attention from the sensory-material sphere (*Castillo* II, i, 4). Likewise, in the later, more mystical experience -oriented mansions, Teresa emphasises that the soul's "intellectual visions" cannot be the work of demons for:

> Such an experience could not possibly proceed from the imagination, and the devil could never reveal things which produce such results in the soul and leave it with such peace and tranquility and with so many benefits. (*Castillo* VI, v, 10. Cf. Fales 1996.)

Similarly, while the Deceiving God and Demon scenarios are often considered to be one and the same for Descartes, there is evidence that they include different spheres of deception, influenced by the Medieval distinction between deception by God and demons. Note that the Deceiving God is summoned specifically to call to question the exercitant's mathematical reasoning and logic[7] which stood intact

[7] Whether this is because her logical steps are unreliable or because she might be confused about the content of her thinking is irrelevant here. See Wilson 1978, 41; Brown 2013.

through the dreaming scenario (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14). The Demon, meanwhile, is mentioned to call into question "the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things", including the exercitant's body and senses, by considering these merely "the delusions of dreams" (AT VII, 22–23, CSM II, 15). Mathematics and reasoning are noticeably missing from the Demon's list.

Of course, Descartes makes the exercitant state "even if it is not in my power to know *any* truth, I shall at least do what is in my power…", indicating that the Demon is intended to call into doubt any and all truth, including mathematics (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15; emphasis added).[8] However, even if this is true, notice that the deceiving God is an *indirect scenario*: it calls to question one's clearest thoughts only after one has already considered them since "[h]ow do I know that [an omnipotent God] has not brought it about that there is not earth, no sky […] while at the same time ensuring that these things appear to me to exist" and "may I not go […] wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of square" since "I sometimes believe that others go astray in cases where they think they have the most perfect knowledge (*perfectissime scire*)" (AT VII, 21; CSM II, 14). I can have the clearest, most perfect cognition of a mathematical truth that I do not seem to be able to doubt; yet, when I turn my thoughts away from it, I start to wonder whether it actually reached any truth at all and was merely an error of an imperfect mind. (See also Forsman 2019; 2021, 135–141.)

The Demon, on the other hand, is a case of *direct interception*. One is expected to imagine a malicious deceiving entity that is *actively* feeding falsified input. Since the exercitant, regardless whether she is an Aristotelian, a philosophical novice, an empiricistic materialist, or a skeptic, tends to still think in an

[8] Even though Descartes states here "any truth", I read the passage in connection with the following Second Meditation where the mathematical doubts are not at the forefront.

imagistic way at this point of the meditation, such direct interception would be especially concentrated on one's ability to access the world through the senses.[9] This way, Descartes concentrates the doubt with the Demon to sensory-material scope for the following Second Meditation, which deals with distinguishing the cognitive 'I' from material existence, drawing the exercitant's attention to refraining from sensory judgments, with focus on material things (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16).[10] By this, the mediator is able to recognize the intuitive truth of her own existence and discover the cognitive peak of her clear and distinct perception (AT VII, 24–25, 31–34; CSM II, 16–17, 20–23).

> But what about when I was considering something very simple and straightforward in arithmetic or geometry [...]. Indeed, the only reason for my later judgment that they were open to doubt was that it occurred to me that perhaps some God could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident And whenever my preconceived belief in supreme power of God comes to mind, I cannot but admit that it would be easy for him, if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in those matters which I think I see utterly clearly with my mind's eye. (AT VII, 35–36; CSM II, 25.)

[9] See the Preface to the French Edition of the *Principia*: "Those who have not followed Aristotle (and this group includes many of the best minds) have nevertheless been saturated with his opinions in their youth (since these are the only opinions taught in the Schools) and this has so dominated their outlook that they have been unable to arrive at knowledge of true principles." AT IXB, 7; CSM I, CSM I, 182. See Cunning (2010) and Forsman (2021, 15–18) for reading the exercitant from different positions.

[10] Considering that the exercitant at this point is still confused about the true nature of mathematics, viewing it belonging to the realm of the senses, it can fall under the Demon's influence and be questionable, at least in this limited sense.

One could ask, if the Deceiving God covers more ground than the Demon does, why does Descartes need both scenarios. Descartes seems often worried about the reader's ability to concentrate on the abstractive meditative parts and gives the reader imagistic exercises to focus on the meditation (e.g., the wax in the Second Meditation). The Demon is to help the exercitant concentrate in leading the mind away from the senses to allow for the introspective turn, much like Teresa's demons help the exercitant reinforce the meditative project for entering further into the castle. Like Teresa's and Aquinas's demons, Descartes's Demon has influence over the exercitant's senses and imagination, actively sending her visions as "delusions of dreams", but is unable to directly affect her intellect, which recognizes clear and distinct perceptions, or her will, which makes her persist in the meditation despite the Demon's best efforts. He writes:

> I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this meditation; and, even if it is not in my power to know any truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, that is, resolutely guard against assenting to any falsehoods, so that the deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, will be unable to impose on me in the slightest degree. (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15.)

3. Demons and Witches

However, there is a sense in which both Teresa's and Descartes's demons are more powerful than Aquinas's. Traditionally, the demons had the power to only affect already existing sensory material (*phantasmas*) stored in the imagination and memory. They could not create new phantasms or destroy or change the cognitive content of the phantasms I already possess. For example, a demon could interfere in my cognitive process right now and make me see golden mountains, but *only* if I have

previously seen gold and mountains in my life. (*De Malo*, Q.16, a.11, ad.9.) In other words, for the traditional demons to be able to deceive me, I still need to have physiological ties (senses and stored phantasms).[11] The traditional demons could not make me think that the external world (including my own body) exists, while it does not. Furthermore, just because a demon would create an image of a golden mountain, I would not automatically believe that the golden mountain exists. After all, our intellect is sort of preprogrammed to always grasp the *true essences* of things. As such, the intellect would be able to scrutinize the image and conclude that it does not include a true essence of a gold mountain (see Perler 2010, 174–176).[12] This is why Aquinas does not take demonic deception seriously as a skeptical possibility; even if a demon would try to deceive us, we would not be fooled by its wiles.

However, by the 16th century, demons had grown considerably more powerful. Popular German preacher Paulus Wann (c. late 1400's) had, along with the typical Aquinian capacities, already included memory into the scope of demonic deception in his work *Quadragesimale de preservatione hominis a peccato* (1501). While he does not outright state that the devil can falsify the presentations of memory (like Descartes's Demon seems to), the demons seem able to overwhelm current sense-impressions, and implant thoughts and arguments into the mind. (*Quad.*, sig. D4, Sermo I–V. Cf. Scarre 1990, 11.)[13]

[11] Cf. Descartes's dreaming scenario, which likewise requires physiological ties (AT VII, 19–20; CSM II, 13–14).

[12] Compare with Ockham and the intellect ability to correctly judge that a non-existent object does not exist.

[13] One should recall that memory was considered one of the internal senses in the Aristotelian tradition and, thus, causal to the same rules of sensory materialism as the external senses and imagination. (See e.g., *ST* I, Q.78, a.4.) Interestingly, Teresa seems to leave memory outside of the demons' circle of influence (*Castillo* II, i, 4). Unlike Teresa, Descartes does consider phantasmal memory to fall under the Demon's sphere of influence (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16).

The main work that emphasized demonic powers in the period was, however, *Malleus Maleficarum*. Originally published anonymously in 1486, the work is typically considered to have been written by Heinrich Kramer (Henricus Institoris, c. 1430–1505) and Jacobus Sprenger (c. 1436–1495). There is debate on who contributed what, or whether Kramer wrote the whole book himself and merely added the more famous Sprenger to boost publications (Sprenger's name was added in 1519, 33 years after his death)[14] Nevertheless, the work became infamous for the European witch trials and epidemics of demonic possessions throughout the 1500's. Both Kramer and Sprenger were Dominicans and strongly influenced by Aquinas. The first part of *Malleus* is written following the pro and contra format of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, with all the questions concerning demons and their power. While the work mostly follows Aquinas's thought, which is repeatedly quoted, Kramer and Sprenger also increase the power of the demons over the angelic doctor. Previously the demons only afflicted imagination and senses, conjuring images and confounding sensory capabilities. However, the account in *Malleus* allows the demons not only to externally effect the senses and imagination but to enter inside the bodies and even minds of people, inflicting the senses, imagination, and memory internally (*Malleus* II, Q.2, ch. 9).

This change gave corporeal reality to the effect of demons, allowing them to inflict real affects on not only the people possessed but also others (*Malleus* I, Q.1).[15] Stories of corporeal possession by demons became common throughout Europe, with several famous cases that Teresa or, for that matter, Descartes could not have been unfamiliar with. One such was Magdalena de la Cruz (1487–1560), a

[14] For a comprehensive discussion on the authorship issue, see Mackay 2006, 103–121.

[15] One of the debates at the time was whether witches were in reality transported to locations of sabbatic activity or did they merely imagine or dream the ordeal, with the *Malleus* declaring both to be true. Cf. Scarre 1990, 12–13.

Fransiscan nun from Córdoba, whose visions and other saintly activities where later considered to have been due to demonic possession and she was sentenced to life imprisonment in a convent. One of her followers included Fransisco de Osuna (c. 1492–1540), a Fransiscan friar whose mystical writings influenced Teresa.[16]

Another famous incident, which happened after Teresa's death but might have influenced Descartes, were the mass possessions of Loudun taking place from 1632–1638, with a full convent of nuns claiming to have been possessed by demons, with the priest Urbain Grandier (1590–1634, who just so happened to be a political enemy of Cardinal Richelieu, 1585–1642) being burned at the stake (see e.g., de Certau 2000). Even Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle, who. as will be argued in the next part, is a possible connection between Teresa and Descartes, was closely involved in one famous case of demonic possession, the exorcism of Martha Brossier (1556–after 1600, see Williams 1989, 35–39; Ferber 2004, chapter 3).[17]

These 16th century accounts impacted also the way Teresa's demons operate. Unlike Aquinas's, Teresa's demons make things extremely difficult for the exercitant. Resisting their deception is so laborious it even halts the meditative progress. Teresa can then be seen as influencing Descartes even on the power that the Evil Demon has. For Teresa, demons can cause desires, tempting images, and even belief in

[16] Teresa's own visions were similarly suspected to be due to demonic rather than divine reasons, which motivated her in distinguishing true visions from those originating from imagination and the devil (*Castillo* VI, v, 10), as well as in writing the autobiographical work *La Vida de la Santa Madre Teresa de Jesús*. See Eire 2019; Griffioen & Phillips forthcoming. Cf. Fales 1996, Underkuffler 2020, 566. It is possible that Teresa's attempts at defending her visions likewise inspired Descartes in his own attempts at distinguishing clear and distinct perceptions as reliable.

[17] See also Alonso de Villegas's *Lives of the Saints* (1583). Cf. Mercer 2014, 34–35.

propositional thoughts.[18] The same goes for Descartes; the propositional content that the Demon causes just tend to be more on the metaphysical side. This metaphysically loaded deception allows Descartes's demon to create a sort of a "bodiless dream", where everything sensed is spurious, memory tells lies, the exercitant has no senses and bodies, even her own, are chimerical (AT VII, 24; CSM II, 16). This allows Descartes to sever physiological ties to reality and expand the dream scenario into more extreme external world skepticism.

4. Demons Dressed in Kingly Guise: Teresa's Demons and Descartes's Deceiver

Having established conceptual similarities between Teresa's and Descartes's accounts, this final section demonstrates that there is historical and textual precedent and evidence for thinking that Descartes was directly informed by Teresa's writings.

While no direct evidence exists that Descartes had read the *Castillo*, Teresa's large recognition, and particular reverence among the Jesuits, make it highly probable. In the face of the Protestant revolution of the late 1500's, the Catholic Church began to promote spiritual, meditative exercises as a counter-reformatory move. One of these spiritual teachers was Teresa and her writings, particularly the *Castillo*, became widely known and translated into several European languages, including Latin and French. (Vendler 1989, 194–195; Rubidge 1990; Mercer 2014, 29; 2017, 2543–2544) Descartes, on the other hand, was educated by the Jesuits, who placed emphasis on such attentive religious meditation, like their founder Ignatius de Loyola's *Exercitia Spiritualia*. Jesuits were one of the main occupants of the counter-

[18] There would obviously be more to say about the historical sources to the possibility of demonic deception, that both Teresa and Descartes share, than is possible to discuss in such a short paper. The author aims to write a separate paper on this topic.

reformation movements and held Teresa in especially high regard. (See e.g., Hatfield 1985; 1986; Vendler 1989; Vitz 2015, 17; Mercer 2014; 2017, 2546.) Not only did Teresa have religious and political ties to the Jesuits (one of her spiritual mentor's was a Jesuit, Francis Borgia), the Jesuits were one of the strongest supporters of her beatification in 1614, while Descartes was close to graduating from the Jesuit school of La Flechè. The *Ratio Studiorum*, a progressive study plan used in Jesuit schools first established in 1599, likewise emphasizes the spiritual development of young men (like Descartes), committed to the care of the school. (Farrell 1970, 14.; cf. Mercer 2017, 2545–2546.) Considering the importance that the Jesuits put on spiritual education, and their particularly favorable relationship with Teresa, that young Descartes was familiar with, and possibly even meditated along Teresa's *Castillo*, is more than likely.

It is also possible that Descartes's interest in meditative exercises goes further than his school years. After Teresa's canonization in 1622, her works were reissued and received further attention (Mercer 2017, 2546). Moreover, Descartes's intellectual circles were deeply connected with Teresa's works. One famous and often recited story from Descartes's intellectual youth reports how he attended a meeting where an alchemist named Chandoux proposed a probabilistic form of science to replace Aristotelian dominance. According to the story, another person present was Cardinal Bérulle, who prodded Descartes to offer his criticism of Chandoux and later had a private audience with him, where Bérulle reportedly encouraged Descartes in his philosophical work. (Baillet: *La Vie* II, xiv.[19]) Bérulle was no mere member of the Church but a powerful statesman and politician. He was also one of the most important mystics in France, the founder of the French Oratory and, along with Madam Acarie (1566–1618) had introduced the Discalded Carmelites, Teresa's reformed Carmelite order, into France. As part of the so called Acarie Circle,

[19] Descartes refers to the event in the Letter to Villebressieu, Summer 1631 (AT I, 213; CSMK, 32.)

spiritually inclined individuals circled around Acarie, he had great interest in mystical meditation form, and seemed to place special importance on Teresa in particular.[20] While, accounts differ on what influence the meeting with Bérulle had on Descartes's later life[21], there is evidence that Descartes had close contact with the Cardinal, perhaps even closer than certain accounts let on.[22] Descartes's friend Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), who reportedly was also present in the Chandoux talk, had likewise connections with the French Oratory and often accompanied Descartes in meeting them during the late 1620's. During these meetings Descartes also struck a close friendship with Bérulle's pupil Guilleme Gibieuf (1583–1650). It seems more than likely then that the Chandoux incident was not the first time Descartes's and Bérulle's paths crossed. (Williams 1989, 225–277; Griffioen & Phillips fortcoming.) This relationship with Bérulle offers further evidence for Descartes's familiarity with Teresa's meditative works as well.[23]

Of course, Teresa's *Castillo* was not the only example of the meditative genre in Descartes's cultural-religious context. There were several meditational exercises passed around in French spiritual

[20] Bérulle made pilgrimages to Teresa's tomb and worked to introduce her to the French spiritualist scene (Williams 1989; Wright 2013). For the Acarie circle, see Cruickshank 1994.

[21] See e.g., Gaukroger 1995; 186; Watson 2002, 147; Grayling 2005, 9, 136; Hook 2018, 186.

[22] Some even suggest Bérulle to have acted as Descartes's spiritual mentor and to have imposed an 'obligation of conscience' on him. (Vendler 1989, 216; Griffoen & Phillips forthcoming).

[23] Griffioen & Phillips (forthcoming) also consider the famous story Descartes's three dreams as further evidence for his interest in mystagogical writings. See Baillet: *La Vie* I, vi. I am more skeptical of the dream story. However, it is interesting how many elements of the *Meditations* make an appearance in the dreams as well, among them the deceiving malign spirit. For more on the dreams see Sebba 1987; Browne 1977; Cole 1992; Withers 2008.

mysticism and the Acarie Circle, both in the "Ignatian" style of Loyola's *Exercitia* and in the older "Augustinian" style, including for example Francis de Sales's *Introduction à la vie devote* (1609) (see Hatfield 1985; 1986; Griffion & Phillips forthcoming). There has been debate on whether Descartes follows more closely the Augustinian or the Ignatian style of meditation in his own work (see note 3). Those in favor of reading the *Meditations* as more Augustinian point to Descartes's strong emphasis on the intellect and withdrawal from the senses, over the more Ignatian feature of strong emphasis on sensory experience and imagination focused on Christian scenes (e.g., Hatfield 1985; 1986; Ariew 2019; Underkuffler 2020). Teresa's *Castillo*, on the other hand, is argued to be closer to the Ignatian style, due to its more Aquinian cognitive basis and reliance on imaginative exercise, and thus, while Descartes might have been inspired by it, he would use a different meditational method in his own work (Underkuffler 2020, 573–576).[24]

The author is more partial to Rorty's (1983; 1986) and Griffioen and Phillips's (forthcoming) conclusion, that Descartes is drawing from a large patch of meditative exercises, instead of just one or two, some of them Augustinian, some Ignatian. However, when it comes to the deceiving demon, Descartes's influence appears to be explicitly Ignatian, with Teresa's *Castillo* as the most likely candidate. Unlike the other more intellectually driven skeptical scenarios, Descartes clearly states the Demon to be an *imaginary* one. Due to arduousness of the meditative journey, the exercitant's customary concerns begin to force their way into the meditation. "My habitual opinions keep coming back, and, despite my wishes, they capture my belief, which is as it were bound over to them as a result of long occupation and force

[24] The paper does not have enough space to contribute to this particular debate. However, it is good to note that Teresa was likewise much influenced by Augustine (her *La Vida* particularly follows the structure of Augustine's *Confessions*), and withdrawal from the senses, particularly in the latter four "mystical" Mansions, is a strong feature in the *Castillo* as well.

of habit." (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15.) The laborious nature of the meditative exercise, as well as the forceful nature by which the previous sensory-material habits and temptations return to halt the meditative progress, are both aspects of meditational exercises more prevalent in imaginative, experience based Ignatian style than contemplative, intellectual Augustinian ones. Compare with Teresa:

> But, oh, my God and Lord, how everything is ruined by the vain habits we fall into and the way everyone follows them! So dead is our faith that we desire what we see more than what faith tells us about – though what we actually see is that people who pursue these visible things meet with nothing but ill fortune. [...] Obviously a great deal of attention will be necessary if we are to be cured and only the great mercy of God will preserve us from death. The soul will certainly suffer great trials at this time, especially if the devil sees that it its character and habits are such that it is ready to make further progress: all the powers of hell will combine to drive it back again. (*Castillo* II, i, 5. Cf. Mercer 2017, 2551),

Descartes's exercitant then decides to "turn my will in completely the opposite direction and *deceive myself*, by *pretending* (*fingam*) for a time that these former opinions are false and imaginary" (AT VII, 22; CSM II, 15: emphasis added). The Demon is conjured to help the exercitant in the process of turning the will in the opposite direction as an imagined external opposition. And, just like in Teresa's *Castillo*, this is an "arduous undertaking" and results in a temporary halt on the meditation and a return to "normal life" by a "kind of laziness" (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15).

> I happily slide back into my old opinions and dread being shaken out of them, for fear that my peaceful sleep may be followed by hard labour when I wake… (AT VII, 23; CSM II, 15.)

There are also obviously clear differences between Descartes and Teresa, especially regarding their prospective meditative projects. Teresa is not that interested in epistemological doubt in general, being more Aquinian in this sense, following the line that the senses and reason work as they should in most (optimal) cases. Her project is to have the exercitant focus on the mystical meditational exercise outside of sensory perceptions and bodily temptations. Descartes has a larger goal in mind, trying to get the meditator not only leave the realm of the senses and the body by the meditation, but also make her question whether even her rational capacity is capable of revealing the truth on anything. This is what he needs the Deceiving God -scenario for, whereas Teresa is not interested in questioning the exercitant's ability to reach the targeted goal (better knowledge of the self and closer union with God). Nevertheless, as this paper has argued, the influence Descartes had from Teresa is very evident in his handling of the Demon skeptical scenario, both in the power and extent of the scenario as well as in its execution in focusing the meditation to stubbornly concentrate on the meditation in the midst of sensory-material opinions forcing their way back in.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to closely analyze Teresa of Ávila's influence on Descartes's Evil Demon skeptical scenario. It began by mapping out similarities between Teresa's and Descartes's meditative projects and how those projects lead their exercitant's to battling with demonic deceivers. Next,

previous late Medieval discussions of divine and demonic deception were analyzed and it was argued that both Teresa and Descartes tend to follow the distinction that the demons can directly influence our senses and imagination, but not our will or intellect. Then the development of demonological accounts of the 1500's was discussed, where the power of the demons was amplified, making it possible for Teresa to have her demons not only impede but halt the meditative progress. This was argued to have opened the door for Descartes's even stronger version of demonic deception, where the Demon can create deceitful, global impressions out of thin air with no need to work with previous sensory phantasmal materials. Finally, historical and textual evidence for Descartes being directly informed by Teresa was presented, which in the Demon case was argued to lie specifically in the *Castello*'s style of meditation.

Looking at previous meditative exercises clarifies the *Meditations* as a text in a literary tradition. Yet, we should be careful to take the meditative exercise form as a guide for reading the *Meditations*, not forcing them to bend to the formula (see Forsman 2021, 11; Griffioen & Phillips forthcoming). For example, for the purposes of the Demon scenario, it makes no difference whether the exercitant considers herself to be under the machinations of a malign spirit, a demiurge, or the Old Nick himself.

Nevertheless, that Descartes's entity is a malevolent spirit (a *genius*) should not be taken too lightly either. It indicates that Descartes was willing to take full advantage of previous meditative resources of imagined physical realities containing deceiving demons, and his use of them in similar passages of the *Meditations* gives his intended audience, already familiar with them, clues what to do in related parts of the meditative project (see Mercer 2014, 35; 2017; cf. Griffioen & Phillips forthcoming). And while Descartes is not after a religious experience similar to the one in the *Castillo* and we ought not to take

his examples of demons as literally as Teresa's, we should not underestimate the closeness of metaphysical knowledge to a mystical, spiritual experience in the tradition Descartes is working in.

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